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1823

Annual Address,

1820, 1822, 1823.

THE
ANNUAL ADDRESS
OF THE
CONFERENCE
TO THE
METHODIST SOCIETIES
IN
GREAT BRITAIN,

IN THE CONNEXION ESTABLISHED BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN WESLEY, M.A.

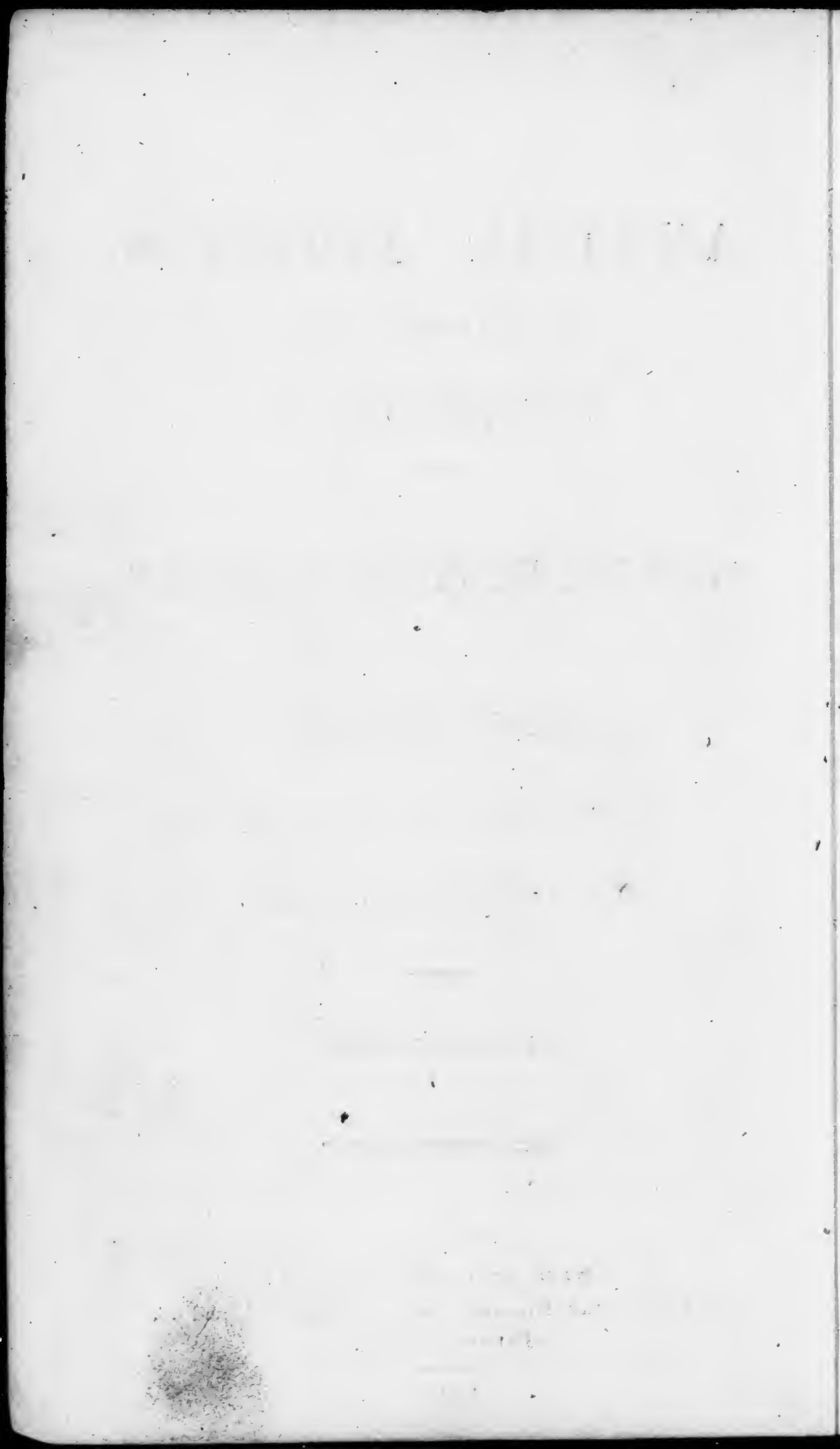
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1820.



ADDRESS,

&c.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,

OUR Seventy-seventh Conference is now approaching its close. It has been crowned with the special presence and blessing of our Divine Master, and distinguished by perfect harmony and brotherly affection.

The religious state of our Societies in Great Britain has been favourably reported of by the Brethren; though we lament to state, that a decrease in our numbers has occurred. We are satisfied, however, that such is the excellence of our discipline, and that, in general, it is so faithfully enforced, that few persons can find admission among us, who are not sincerely desirous to make their calling and election sure; and that still fewer will long remain, who have in their hearts "forsaken the law of their God." Under the painful circumstance of some decline in our numbers, we derive satisfaction from the confidence we have, that, as a body, our people are "walking in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost."

We cannot, however, but deeply regret, that, in proportion to the number of ministers employed, and the various means of grace which it is the privilege of our Societies and Congregations to enjoy, our success

has, during the year, been so limited, and that we have not had to rejoice, as usual, in a "multitude being added to the Lord."

Many circumstances, we are aware, have of late occurred in our country, which have had an unhappy effect in counteracting the influence of Religion upon society, and in obstructing the operation of the best adapted means of turning the thoughts of men to serious and eternal things. Commercial embarrassment, and consequent distress, have largely prevailed, and especially in those districts where usually we have had the greatest success in "turning many to righteousness." Unhappily, that distress has not produced general humiliation before God, and a livelier impression of the necessity and supreme importance of those blessings which, by the mercy of God, are exempted from the mutations of the world, and which it can neither give nor take away. Political agitations have spread through the land; the correcting hand of a just and holy God has not been acknowledged; and, too frequently, every attempt to improve the chastisements of heaven to moral uses, has been the object of the scorner's scoff. The attention of the Public has been engaged by a succession of inquietudes, and irritated by the strifes of parties. Thus, where direct opposition to the religion of Christ has not been produced, by an avowed infidelity, a moral deadness to Divine things has been largely diffused. The Sabbath, and the ordinances of the house of God, have been more than commonly neglected by those whom custom, if not religious feeling, used formerly to lead into his temples; and where the word of God has been heard, it has often found the heart too much occupied with earthly cares, or stirred up by earthly passions, so to receive

the word of God as to “bring forth fruit unto perfection.” For these reasons, the last year may be considered, as one of great spiritual dearth in many parts of the nation ; and perhaps those special effusions of the Holy Spirit, by which such hindrances to the progress of true Religion are commonly removed, have been withheld ; both to produce in us a livelier sense of their necessity, and that the effects of evil principles upon the best interests of individual man, and on society, might be made more manifest ; in order to call forth more earnest prayers from the faithful, and incite them to “labours more abundant.”

Whilst deploring the small success of our Ministry in the past year, we have not failed to examine our own hearts, lest any decay in the fervour of our own piety, lest any deficiency of zealous service in the cause of our great Master, should have obstructed the work and blessing of God. To similar “searchings of heart,” and to the most serious review of every past neglect and failure, we now affectionately and earnestly call you. Let us stir up the “gift that is within us,” and be more strictly “blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,” that we may “shine as the lights of the world, holding forth the word of life.” The “times and the seasons” more especially call upon us to be decided in our religious character : fruitful in good counsel, and in good works ; exemplary in family worship, and attendance on the public means of grace ; pitiful to deluded and strayed souls ; and careful not to be “conformed to the world.” Thus a holier, and more efficacious influence will be exerted upon our families, our brethren in Christ, and upon our beloved country, “in whose peace we have peace,” and to

whose moral improvement and salvation our system was from the first devoted by our venerable founder. Let the abounding of iniquity, therefore, excite within us a nobler spirit of Christian enterprise; and the numerous agencies of evil which are now employed to destroy, stir us up to urge into more energetic action, the saving institutions of the Gospel of Christ. Let us, dear Brethren, "renew our strength by waiting upon God," and redouble our efforts to instruct the ignorant, to reclaim every wanderer, to make manifest in every place the savour of the knowledge of Christ; and by patience of instruction and labour extend that great work in which we are engaged, and have hitherto, by the Divine blessing, been so successful. But never may we forget, that as all success depends upon God, we can only obtain it as we are "instant in prayer," and deeply experienced in personal holiness. It is a truth which we cannot too frequently impress upon our own hearts, and upon you, that the recovery of souls, and the edification of the churches, are the sole and glorious work of the "*Eternal Spirit*." Let us then more earnestly and perseveringly supplicate the effusion of his influence upon our congregations and our country, "that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified;" let us fully and exclusively depend upon his aid in every act of religious duty; and whilst in the exercise of our humble trust we acknowledge God, he will not fail to regard our prayers, and vouchsafe the fulness of his blessing.

From our dear Brethren in Ireland we have received the cheering statement, that upwards of 1200 persons have been added to their number in the course of the last year, and that with this increase, the spirit of peace and meekness has greatly diffused itself, and bound up

the Societies more firmly into one body, " striving together for the hope of the gospel." The sufferings of our people, and the privations of the preachers in Ireland, have been very severe, in consequence of the general depression of commerce in that country ; but sufferings have produced no impatient complaints among the people, nor privations enervated the zealous labours of their ministers.

The reports laid before us, as to the state and prospects of the work of God in our Foreign Missions, by the Missionary Committee, afford us the highest satisfaction. In every place, prospects of great usefulness present themselves, and in many there has been a great increase in the Societies. The blessings of religion are rapidly diffusing themselves through the negro population of the West India Colonies; and in many entirely heathen parts of the world, by translations, schools, and other labours of our brethren, the light of the knowledge of Christ is breaking through the gloom of ages, turning the attention and hearts of men " to the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent." Thus, as a body, we are taking a large share in the true vocation of the general Church of Christ, the extension of the name and kingdom of our Lord to the ends of the earth. For this great service, a sufficient number of qualified labourers have been raised up, and sent into " fields white unto harvest ;" and the funds for their support have been most liberally supplied by your charity, and the kindness of the friends of Missions in general. In these exertions of your zeal and piety, we greatly rejoice : they have received the seal of the sanction and blessing of the Lord of the Churches. A success unprecedented in the history of modern Missions has been vouchsafed to the labours of our

brethren in various scenes of their foreign labour; and the present state, and enlarging prospects of our Missions generally, may be considered as the voice of our God, inviting us to new efforts and triumphs, and saying, "Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as *ye know*, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." The increase of our Societies abroad for the last year is 2292.

The Conference has felt peculiar satisfaction in receiving a Representative from the General American Conference, after a suspension of personal communication for some years. Circumstances, and not any diminution of affection, had interrupted this grateful interchange of brotherly affection and mutual esteem. The renewal of it by the deputation of our excellent and beloved brother EMORY, has given us great joy. Through him we have received the assurances of that regard which is felt by our brethren in the United States towards the Methodists of Great Britain, by whom that work which now diffuses light and life through the vast space of that great and rising country was first commenced, and their desire that a regular intercourse by deputation from each Conference should be established. All the expressions of kindness thus communicated to us by brother EMORY, in the name and on the behalf of the General American Conference, have been echoed back by the sympathies of our hearts. We could not hear his statements, as to the state and progress of the common work in the United States of America, without being deeply affected with gratitude to God, and admiration of the ardour and enterprise of our brethren there in the cause of Christ. Their unwearied labours have not only, by the Divine blessing,

raised up large and flourishing societies in the principal cities and towns of the Union, but they have erected the altars of God in the distant wilderness, and connected the insulated settlements of men, with the hopes, the joys, and the worship of the universal church. As the tide of population has extended itself over that vast country, they have followed it, embracing every opportunity to reach, and submitting to great difficulties and privations, to save souls. To these labours they were long animated by the noble example of the venerable ASBURY, a man of apostolic labours, whose spirit of patient zeal and self-denying piety has abundantly descended upon the excellent General Superintendants, who now direct those vast means which exist in a state of increasing activity in the American continent, for the extension of the hallowing influence of true religion through the growing population of the Anglo-American empire. The present number of travelling preachers in the American Methodist connexion is reported by Mr. EMORY to be near 900; of local preachers 3000; of members, at least 257,000; making an increase for the last year of upwards 16,000. Such has been the glorious result of little more than half a century, and of that feeble commencement of the work which took place in 1766. An efficient religious system, operating wide as that extensive country, has been thus created, which already has begun to extend itself beyond its bounds, ample as they are, to the pagan Indians on its borders, and promises, under Divine Providence, to disperse the rays of truth to the still benighted parts of that great continent, on the north, the west, and the south;—to parts where civilization is silently laying the foundation of future states, but now involved in superstition, or the bewildering darkness of

paganism and idolatry. To these great successes, and still greater prospects, our hearts have been delightfully directed by the kind visit of our beloved brother, and with invigorated affection we have embraced our distant brethren, *one* with us in doctrine, *one* in the object of their labours, and *one* in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The financial difficulties of the Connexion continue to press upon many Circuits, in consequence of regulations which its circumstances, and those of the times, rendered necessary. But we have great satisfaction in witnessing the general success of our recent financial measures, and in seeing ourselves freed from those annual embarrassments which previously occurred. The restraints which may thus have been placed on the work in some Circuits, are, we trust, but temporary. They will give place to the increase of our societies generally, and to the firmer establishment of the cause where it is now but feeble and recent. We have only to labour with fidelity, and to be supported by your prayers and earnest co-operation, in order to witness the still further growth of piety and religion, and to extend their influence into the yet dark and neglected parts of our country. The difficulties which exist, may, however, become the occasion of bickerings and strife. Let us guard against this danger, and let all who are concerned in the management of the affairs of our Societies, carry into every department the spirit and temper of men who are acting for God in the service of his church. Every part of his work is consecrated service, and ought to be performed in his name, and with singleness of heart to his glory. Meetings for conducting the affairs of a religious society are not for debate and contention, but for ascertaining how the cause of Christ, and of human

salvation, may most effectually be promoted. Let all, therefore, who may be thus engaged in official stations in our societies, act in the fear of God; let them "set the Lord at their right hand" in every part of their public conduct, and let brotherly love continue. We may then confidently expect the blessing of heaven upon every measure; and we, with all our friends who aid us in these services, shall depart from all our meetings refreshed in spirit, and girded in strength for our spiritual welfare.

The claims on the Chapel Fund have greatly increased, a part only of the distressed cases having last year been presented for relief. Now, probably, we see the extent of these incumbrances, and though the fund has not been able to allow the whole of the relief requested, it has, however, been afforded, to every case which could claim according to rule, to an extent which will greatly relieve the Trustees and Societies. The efficiency of the plan, which has now had its greatest trial, is therefore apparent, and when so great a benefit is conferred by it, in its infancy, we may confidently look forward to the time, when it will be completely adequate to the objects of its institution, by enabling distressed chapels to pay the deficiencies of their interest, and, when the fund shall become more ample, by gradually liquidating a part of their debt. These happy results, however, wholly depend upon the constant and liberal assistance of our friends, to whose kindness we again affectionately commend a fund so important in its design, and so intimately connected with the success of the work of God, in many of our Circuits. We must, however, specially caution our friends against the building of Chapels imprudently, and in an expensive

stile. The plainness which becomes Christians in their dress, and in the furniture of their houses, ought to distinguish their places of worship. Examples of the evil of a contrary practice are sufficiently numerous and warning, to render it necessary for us to press this subject upon your attention; and we trust that a faithful discharge of their duties by the Chapel Building Committee will effectually prevent the recurrence of cases which we have greatly regretted.

From the adoption of the Children's Fund by the great majority of Circuits, another great measure, connected with our itinerant plan of labour, has, we trust, been firmly established. To those Circuits who were first and most anxious to accede to this regulation, we owe particular obligations. They have shown themselves interested, not only in their own local affairs, but in the welfare of the Connexion at large. We earnestly hope, that the uniform adoption of this measure, by all our Circuits, will speedily take place. It is evidently sanctioned by the almost universal approbation of the Connexion. Let our brethren remember, therefore, that we are one body, and on such questions are bound to meet the general will. The object of the measure is the common interest of the Connexion, by equalizing its burdens, and facilitating the change of preachers; and with the welfare of the whole the prosperity of every part is vitally connected.

If we are anxious to impress this consideration upon you, it is not merely with reference to this and other institutions among us, important as they are, but chiefly for the sake of that great object which we all wish to promote, the revival and spread of true Religion throughout the land, and which only can be

promoted by this unity of feeling and co-operation, and by a zeal ever renewed, and fed by the solemn dedication of ourselves in every place, and in every sphere of labour, to the service of our God. As a body we do not exist for the purpose of party. Our aim has been higher: and if ever it sought to fix itself with firmness upon elevated purposes, it is at the present moment. Large and extensive fields of usefulness lie around us; and if we keep our calling constantly in mind, if we live under the deep impression of the spiritual and moral dangers of our country, and of the worth of souls, we shall not fail to unite with our efforts to make known the name of Christ to pagans abroad, exertions more comprehensive and ardent for the diffusion of religious light and influence at home. We ourselves would anew impress upon our minds the admonition of our venerable Founder, "Your only business is to save souls;" and in the name of our Lord we call for your awakened and renewed co-operation. We have most solemnly given up ourselves again to this, the only true object of the Christian ministry. Let us carry along with us your heightened fervour, that by common efforts in every place, our societies may be built up in faith, and established in holiness, and the work extended into every neighbourhood to which a spirit like that of our great Master, who came "to seek," that he might save, can obtain access.

With those of our dear people who still suffer in the distresses of our country, we deeply sympathize. "We weep with those that weep;" and we know the tears which many of you have shed, and the anxieties which have filled your hearts. We trust that these afflictive dispensations to the nation are but tempo-

rary, and that the prayers which are constantly offered to Him who "ruleth among the nations," will finally prevail in behalf of the poor. To him you have looked, and found support in the present consolations and the future hopes of Christianity. May your minds be still sustained upon the immovable rock of the Divine promises. Amidst every earthly change, your God and Saviour is eternally the same; the sure confidence of all who fly to him for refuge, "a very present help in trouble." "He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation," and to make temporary trial the means of spiritual and everlasting good. "Trust ye then in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

We have thought it our duty, as representing so great a number of his Majesty's subjects, to prepare an Address to our Sovereign, on his accession to the throne of these realms. This was unanimously voted on the first day of our meeting; and whilst we thus announce to you that we have complied with what you, from your known loyalty, and regard to the institutions of the country, and to the illustrious house of Brunswick, expected from us as your Ministers and representatives, in expressing to his present Majesty our joy at his accession, and our fervent prayers for the prosperity of his reign, we cannot but record our grateful and affectionate remembrance of the name and virtues of our late venerable sovereign, **GEORGE THE THIRD**, under whose long-continued reign our religious liberties were held so sacred, and under whose administration we never failed to obtain protection and redress, both for ourselves and our societies abroad. May the throne of his Successor be established in righteousness. May there be "peace and truth in his days."

“ And now, brethren, we commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified.” After having largely and seriously conferred on those subjects in which we have with you a common concern and interest, we are about to separate, and re-commence our labours among you in our several circuits. We are reminded, by the close of another of our annual assemblies, in which we have renewed our mutual affection, that those tender and intimate bonds which unite us to you and to each other, and which we trust will acquire increasing strength as long as we remain on earth, must ere long be broken. Every year records on our Minutes the death of many of our fellow-labourers, and your faithful pastors. The peaceful scenes of the church, and of a religious society, where we so often mingle in holy friendships, and feel how good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity, must soon close upon us and you. “ Let our conversation be in heaven ;” let us imbibe more of the spirit of those above, the conquerors before the throne, as we approach their society, and view their glories in a perspective less dark and distant. Let us follow them as they followed Christ. So shall our Lord count us worthy to stand in his presence, and to minister in his heavenly sanctuary the offerings of exalted praise, eternal love, and celestial service. So shall we join those venerable names on whose labours we have entered, and the fruits of whose toils and sufferings we so largely enjoy, and renew that union with each other which now conveys to our hearts a delight so rich and supporting, in that kingdom of our Lord, where it shall for ever remain, unalloyed with

human change and human frailty. The grace of our
Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Signed in behalf, and by order of the Conference,

JABEZ BUNTING, *President,*
GEORGE MARSDEN, *Secretary.*

Liverpool, August 7th, 1820.